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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 2146
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 000096

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/12/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [PHUM](#) [BL](#)
SUBJECT: COCHABAMABA UPDATE: QUIETER BUT TENSIONS REMAIN

REF: A. LA PAZ 84

[1](#)B. LA PAZ 83
[1](#)C. LA PAZ 75
[1](#)D. LA PAZ 54

Classified By: Amb. Philip S. Goldberg for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Cochabamba remained mostly calm throughout the night and during the day of January 12, following the violence of January 11. According to Police Inspector General Fernando Pelaez, there were two deaths and approximately 150 injured on January 11. Early January 12, President Morales called on pro-GOB groups not to be vengeful. By midday, an estimated 25,000 people attended a "cabildo" (town hall meeting) organized by pro-MAS social sector groups in Cochabamba's main square. The organizers continued to clamor for Prefect Reyes' resignation, argued for increased vigilance, and suggested the seizing of Reyes' personal properties. The Ambassador called Vice President Garcia Linera three times; first to express his concern and to suggest that the government urge cocaleros and campesinos to leave the city and to apprise the vice president of a request by the Bolivian military to move troops to the city. He also reached out to other diplomatic missions and urged them to call senior GOB officials with the same message; most agreed. The city remains tense, but there are signs that the situation is quieting down. Pro-government leaders were calling on their supporters to lift the blockade around the city. In addition, there are rumors that Prefect Reyes may back down on his call for a new autonomy referendum, which many consider a step towards a possible solution to the conflict, although others believe it will not be enough. End Summary.

The Situation Overnight

[1](#)2. (U) Cochabamba remained mostly calm throughout the night and during the day of January 12, following the violence of January 11. The army received reinforcements overnight, and

both police and military patrolled the streets maintaining a tense calm. Despite their presence, pro- and anti-GOB groups remain armed.

January 11 Toll: Two Deaths, 150 Injured

13. (U) According to Police Inspector General Fernando Pelaez, there were two deaths and approximately 150 injured during the January 11 violence. The first death was a pro-MAS 40-year old cocalero named Nicomedes Gutierrez; the second death was 16-year old ant-MAS protester Cristian Urresti. Cochabamba's Viedma hospital reported handling 110 injured. Two other clinics reported an additional 39 injured. There were new reports of attacks on the press; an ATB network cameraman, Wilson Menchaca, was brutally beaten, and the Unitel network building was attacked by campesinos. (Note: The Unitel building was attacked again January 12, but was protected by GOB forces who used rubber bullets. Three protesters were hurt. End Note).

January 12 Events

14. (U) Early January 12, President Morales called on pro-GOB social groups to act in a democratic fashion, to refrain from vengeance, and to seek dialogue as a means of resolving conflict. By midday, an estimated 25,000 people attended a "cabildo" town hall meeting) organized by pro-MAS social sector groups in Cochabamba's main square, site of the January 8 attacks. The cabildo's organizers stated three main objectives: the ratification of their demand for the resignation of Prefect Manfred Reyes; an increase in pressure against Reyes; and finally the physical confiscation of Reyes' personal property. Prior to the cabildo, thousands of campesinos (non-cocaleros) from the poor outskirts of Cochabamba marched to the city center. Later, many of the protesters began marching north towards the areas where the January 11 confrontations took place. Rumors circulated that they planned to seize Prefect Reyes' home outside the city and take his apartment in the city.

15. (U) At 3:00 PM, Prefect Reyes reportedly flew to Santa Cruz to meet with Catholic Church Cardinal Julio Terrazas in hopes that the church could help mediate a solution. Separately, Human Rights Ombudsman Waldo Albarracin announced he would go to Cochabamba and work with the church to mediate the conflict. By 4:00 PM, there were reports that some cocaleros were leaving Cochabamba and removing blockades.

Ambassador Calls the Vice President

16. (C) The Ambassador called Vice President Garcia Linera the evening of January 11 and expressed his regret regarding the day's events and his concern for the 3,000 U.S. citizens living in Cochabamba. He also urged to the vice president to take action to deconflict the two sides by urging the cocaleros and campesinos to return home. The vice president explained that he was saddened and sorry for what had happened and said he ordered additional police and military to help secure the city. At 1:00 PM, January 12, the Ambassador called the vice president again and proposed and reiterated his approach to improve the situation. First, the Ambassador suggested that the GOB should publicly discourage additional protesters from entering the city, encourage those protesters in the city to leave, and that the GOB should deploy adequate troops to police and stabilize the situation. The vice president said that the GOB was discreetly asking social organization leaders to withdraw protesters from the city, but could not do so publicly. The Ambassador emphasized that the pro-GOB groups needed to have an "exit" from the city. At 4:00 PM on January 12, the Ambassador spoke with the vice president yet again to inform him of a request from the Bolivian military for assistance in

transporting troops to Cochabamba. Garcia Linera responded that General Vargas had told him that the military did not need additional troops. The vice president asked the Ambassador not to transport any troops until he heard via the vice president that USG assistance was needed. At 7:00 PM local time the military informed the Embassy that it did not plan to send additional troops.

17. (C) Despite the Ambassador's January 11 call to Garcia Linera the vice president took a hard line against Reyes in a televised speech to the nation that evening. He lamented that Reyes had gone to La Paz to politick with his counterparts during the conflicts in Cochabamba. He added that in the past three days, the GOB had worked to try to pacify the situation while Reyes only demonstrated intransigence. In response, Prefect Reyes, argued that the GOB was responsible for the "spilling of blood" in Cochabamba.

Calling on the International Community

18. (C) The Ambassador and DCM reached out to other diplomatic missions (Brazil, Peru, Spain, Germany, the European Union, and the United Kingdom) to forge a united voice in calling on the GOB to pacify the situation, using the Ambassador's approach. All the missions agreed with the exception of the Brazilians. Garcia Linera mentioned to the Ambassador that he had heard from several European Ambassadors.

Comment

19. (C) Cochabamba remains tense. However, the arrival of additional security forces and perhaps the natural tendency for residents to return to their homes on the weekend appears to have calmed the situation. In addition, pro-government leaders were calling on their supporters to lift the blockade around the city. Reports are also circulating that Prefect Reyes has written a letter dropping his demand for a new autonomy referendum, which the GOB has argued would help solve the current impasse. According to the reports, Reyes will wait until after he meets with Cardinal Terrazas to make the letter public. End Comment.
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